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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement submitted by the Women's National Commission, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Gender-responsive budgeting involves the review of both the expenditure and revenue side of the budget, and provides a means of holding governments accountable for their commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women; it enables governments to assess where policies need adjustment and where resources are needed to address gender inequalities. Gender-responsive budgets contribute to increased transparency of the budgetary process by promoting the translation of policy commitments into concrete programmes.[i]

The Women's National Commission (WNC) is the official, independent, advisory body giving the views of women to the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the only organisation of this kind in the United Kingdom. It aims to ensure that women's views are represented to the Government and are heard in public debate.

The WNC represents around 500 partner organisations, ranging from large national and international organisations, to smaller local groups. Its aim is to support, advise and encourage the United Kingdom women's sector to progress their work on women's equality. It also aims to act as a conduit for their voices, to both advise and hold Government to account. The WNC also helps to disseminate important messages about government reform, policy developments and consultations, from Government to the women's sector.

Our leading partner on gender budgeting, the Women's Budget Group (WBG), is an independent organisation bringing together individuals from academia, non-governmental organisations and trade unions to promote gender equality through appropriate economic policy. Its work asks the question: 'Where do resources go, and what impact does resource allocation have on gender equality?' The impact that Government expenditure can have on women's everyday lives is of concern to our partners; and they are especially concerned about women experiencing poverty, and its link with child poverty. Tackling women's poverty is critical to the long-term success of the United Kingdom Government's child poverty strategy. In the United Kingdom, 20% of white women are living in poverty; 38% of Black women and 64% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.[ii]

The WBG aims to not only encourage, but assist the Government in using gender analysis to improve its economic policymaking. The WBG also advocates specific policies. The work of the WBG is focused at the United Kingdom level, but is linked with groups that have similar aims in Scotland and Wales and with both NGOs and intergovernmental organisations that promote gender budgeting internationally.

The developed countries need to lead, within their own economic planning processes, on gender budgeting. This means working with the women's NGOs and economists with gender expertise to ensure that each budget is analysed for its impact on gender equality.

Why is this important for a developed country?

In the United Kingdom the budget is not yet routinely analysed for its effect on gender equality. But women's poverty and inequality is still a major constraint on economic progress: the Government set up the Women and Work Commission two years ago to address the persistent gender pay gap. Although it is against United Kingdom law to pay women less than men for work of the same value,

the gap now stands at around 17% of mean hourly rates for full-time work, and for part-time work, mainly undertaken by women, it is 35%. This is due more to structural inequality than direct discrimination: a gendered labour market accounts for much of the gap, with women overrepresented in lower paid sectors – cleaning, caring, catering, and cashiering. Women are also overrepresented in home-based work, where average earnings are around 2/3 of the minimum wage: 90% are women, and almost half from ethnic minorities.[iii] Overall, removing barriers to women's participation in the labour market could be worth up to 2% of the United Kingdom's GDP.[iv]

Other issues of concern to women such as violence against women have a hidden economic impact. Research in England and Wales has shown that the cost of domestic violence alone is around £23 billion per year (including health costs, criminal justice system costs, loss of employment etc). The health-related cost of a rape is now calculated as £73,487 per case (11,867 rapes were reported in 2003 and it is estimated that 85% of incidents go unreported) and the costs of sexual violence support services exceed £9.5 million. Unless these costs are calculated, there is no clear picture of the impact of women's inequality and the case for investment to save these costs.

Successes in the United Kingdom

Research by government and feminist economists, and lobbying by NGOs, has quantified these problems and created political momentum. The Government has passed a law requiring all public bodies to promote gender equality.[v] This, crucially, goes beyond banning discrimination, and puts the onus on public bodies to ensure there is no structural bias in their pay systems or in their policies, including their budgets, to the detriment of women. In August 2007, the WNC launched a consultation on the Minister for Women's priorities which included supporting families; tackling violence against women and supporting women offenders, and empowering black minority and ethnic women (BME) in the community. The consultation received an overwhelming amount of responses, the results of which have been presented to the Minister to help take the priorities forward.

What needs to be done now?

The UN can help by making a strong declaration in favour of gender budgeting that requires all member states to take clear steps. Many countries have put in place good practice. All member states must now be required to report progress regularly. This will identify where the money and resources are being spent, which is the key to reversing the current gender bias in all the world's economies. At regional and state level, gender budget groups must be given the resources they need to assist in gender analysis, and work with economists in universities and state institutions to mainstream gender budgeting into the economic planning cycle.

Participatory budgeting initiatives must be undertaken in all member states, with a gendered perspective. Further research on the value of women's unpaid work at home and in the community is

essential to assess its economic and social impact. The EU should lead by financing the European coordination of this work, and by fully implementing the call of the European Women's Lobby[vi] for gender budgeting methods within the European Commission and the EU budget.

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[i] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/financing_gender_equality/Online%20discussion%20report_FFGE-%2019%20Oct.%2007.pdf

[ii] Women's and children's poverty: making the links, K Women's Budget group 2005. http://www.wbg.org.uk/documents/WBGWomensandchildrenspoverty.pdf

[iii] UK Homeworkers' Campaign, headed by an alliance comprising the National Group on Homeworking (NGH), trade unions, the TUC and Oxfam (GB). http://www.maketradefair.com/en/index.php?file=06022004155955.htm

[iv] Towards a Fairer Future: Implementing the Women and Work Commission recommendations

[v] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/EOC/PDF/Policy/GED_CoP_Draft.pdf

[vi] Gender Equality *Road Map* for the European Community 2006-2010, http://www.wunrn.com/news/2007/09_07/09_03_07/090907_europe.htm